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ABSTRACT

Suggestions to help school administrators develop and implement a systematic crisis response system are provided in this guidebook, which focuses on system organization rather than staff training. The guidelines are designed to help administrators prepare for, manage, and evaluate site-based responses to various crisis situations, specifically, suicide, natural disasters, rape, homicide, and riots. Following the introduction, section 2 outlines steps in establishing a crisis management plan, including creating a crisis response team (CRT). Section 3 examines schoolwide responses to crisis, including general procedures and suggestions for staff meetings and longterm followup after a crisis. Effective crisis responses in situations that require limited school involvement are described in the fourth section. Cases include attempted suicide, suicidal risk, rape, homicide, and riots. The fifth section outlines procedures for CRT training and staff inservice. A sample structure for organizing community support services is presented. Sections 7 and 8 include staff training and family handouts, and the final section lists 67 references by topic. Various checklists and one figures are included. (LMI)

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A guide for school administrators

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Preventing Chaos in Times of Crisis
A Guide for School Administrators

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South Bay Juvenile Diversion Project

1992

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In Colorado, the development team consisted of Melinda Jones, Betsy Bethea, and Don Marinelli of the Boulder Valley Public Schools. The California authors were Melinda Jones of SWRL and Lisa Paterson from the South Bay Juvenile Diversion Project.

During its development in Colorado and California, the material offered in this guide was reviewed by a number of local and national level school professionals who are knowledgeable about and familiar with crisis management in the schools. A preliminary draft of this guide was submitted to experts across the nation for review and critique. The suggestions and comments from the following reviewers are greatly appreciated:

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Crisis is, sadly, all too common an occurrence in schools across the nation. The developers of this manual hope it will contribute to your effective management of crisis situations.

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Crises occur whether or not we plan for them, and it is unlikely that any school will escape the necessity of responding to a significant crisis. However, because crises are usually unanticipated, crisis planning frequently gets "lost in the shuffle" of the numerous daily anticipated challenges of running a school.

For the purposes of this manual, "crisis" is defined as:

> **A sudden, generally unanticipated event that profoundly and negatively affects a significant segment of the school population and often involves serious injury or death.**

Although experience has taught us we lack control over the onset of such events, we can prevent unnecessary turmoil. Planned schoolwide crisis management can significantly reduce disruption during times of high stress and can prevent catastrophic events from escalating into schoolwide chaos. In situations affecting a smaller number of students and staff, or those in which the school serves primarily as a back-up to law enforcement, a structured response by a trained team or staff members can minimize damage and facilitate the return to a normal daily routine.

Any death or significant trauma to a student or staff member affects members of the school community; however, most of these are essentially private griefs. In these cases, classroom attention, grief counseling, and other routine support services offered by the the school will suffice. From the school administrator's point of view, these events do not constitute as crises.

What is considered a crisis in one school environment may not be a crisis in another setting. For example, in a high school of 4,000, a student's death may affect only his/her class or grade level team. In a student body of 300, that same death may be a significant crisis—especially if the community is one of close-knit and interrelated families. The identity of students affected also can influence the response, as can the degree of drama inherent in the event. A lethal crash or drive-by shooting witnessed by students at school will create significantly more ripples than the same occurrence far from the school during vacation.

In times of crisis, administrators will want to disrupt the school routine as little as possible to efficiently and effectively control the situation. Developing a crisis management process is a significant step in that direction.

This manual will help school principals and their designees *prepare for*, *manage*, and *evaluate* site-based responses to various crisis situations. The following pages provide information relevant to the management of any school crisis, and specifically address suicide, natural disasters, rape, homicide, and riots.

Overview

This manual is divided into nine sections (including the *Introduction*) and arranged to facilitate the development and implementation of a systematic crisis response. While training suggestions are included, the material is designed to aid administrators in structuring their program and is not intended as a complete training guide. The focus is on system organization rather than staff training.

Section II — **Planning Ahead** explains the decisions that must be made before a crisis occurs to ensure thorough and consistent responses to whatever events arise. The checklist in this section can be used to monitor development of the crisis management system.

Section III — **Schoolwide Crisis Response** helps you respond to a major schoolwide crisis. The section includes procedures for general crisis intervention, suggestions for an emergency staff meeting, and material on systematic long-term follow-up. Specific material on suicide and natural disasters also is included.

Section IV — **Limited Crisis Response Team (CRT) Response** addresses crises that require an organized response from the Crisis Response Team and other designated district and/or community staff, but do not necessitate the mobilization of the entire school. Some of these cases are handled primarily by law enforcement agencies, with the school taking a supportive role. Attempted suicide, suicidal risk, rape, homicide, and riots are discussed in this section.

Section V — **Training Outlines** suggests outlines for Crisis Response Team training and for staff in-service. A sample structure for organizing pertinent community support services also is presented.

Section VI — **Forms** contains sample forms that will aid in the organization of crisis response.

Section VII — **Handouts for Staff** provides handouts for use during staff training and as reminders during crisis situations.

Section VIII — **Handouts for Families** provides several handouts that can be sent home to families to help them better deal with their children following a school crisis.

Section IX — The **References** provides a number of suggestions for reading on specific topics, such as gangs, earthquakes, and rape.

The Crisis Response Team Concept

This manual describes the Crisis Response Team concept as a practical method for schools to quickly and effectively respond to crisis situations on their campuses. The CRT concept was designed to streamline school procedures and provide a structural format for school administrators

and staff during times of extreme stress when important and often difficult decisions need to be made and acted upon quickly. It is a concept that enables school sites to be prepared and functional during crises.

Development of a CRT consists of selecting and training school personnel to provide services and support to a school campus during crises (See *Section II: Planning Ahead* and *Section V: Training Outlines*). In many cases, existing school-site teams can be readily augmented to become the Crisis Response Team. It is important to remember, however, that effective crisis response depends on the physical presence of trained staff members. If existing teams are composed largely of itinerant staff, it may be more appropriate to assemble a team composed of full-time staff.

> **If for any reason a school feels unable to isolate a specifically trained team, the material and checklists in each section will still prove useful to those administrators and staff members anxious to "cover all the essential bases" and limit liability in times of crisis.**

Cultural Considerations

Because this manual is designed primarily as an organizational tool, detailed instructional content is generally not included. As with any other school procedures, however, it is important to be sensitive to and knowledgeable about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the student population. Do not assume that direct translation of materials from English into other languages will suffice. Training for both the CRT and general staff should include mention of any cultural concerns or practices that may affect or be affected by school procedures in times of crisis. Should building staff be unfamiliar with the various community populations, local representatives of the different cultural groups should be enlisted to educate staff and review crisis procedures. Staff members also must be aware of cultural and religious rituals that may be necessary for some cultures to perform before resuming normal daily activities.

SECTION II: PLANNING AHEAD

Establishing a Crisis Management Plan

It is extremely important that your school staff and administrators make advance plans for crisis situations. A school that is prepared before a crisis occurs will be much more likely to deal with students and staff effectively. An unprepared school is asking for chaos.

It is important to include the following activities in setting up a crisis management plan. A checklist is provided at the end of this section.

1. **Decide who will be in charge during a crisis.**

   A crucial first step in crisis management planning is to decide who will be in charge during a crisis. Assign one person to provide leadership during emergency situations, to organize activities, and to disseminate information. Often the person in charge is the principal or vice principal.

   Designate a substitute in the event that the appointed person is unavailable at the time of the emergency. It is extremely important that all staff and students know who these people are. Identification badges may be helpful.

2. **Select your Crisis Response Team.**

   A second important step is to recruit members for your Crisis Response Team. Typically, the Crisis Response Team will consist of an administrator, nurse, psychologist and/or social worker, teachers, counselor, support staff representative, and others with skills appropriate to the tasks to be performed. Most, if not all, of your team members must be present full time at the school—or able to respond immediately to a telephone call.

3. **Develop clear and consistent policies and procedures.**

   It is absolutely critical to develop policies and supporting procedures that provide all staff with clear guidelines for tasks and responsibilities during crises and emergencies. This also ensures that all staff will respond consistently in each situation. It is important to include policies and procedures by which children will be released to their caregivers.

4. **Provide training for the CRT.**

   A suggested outline for training the CRT is provided in *Section V: Training Outlines*.

5. **Establish a police liaison.**

Designate one person from the school system with whom the police can communicate. Inform the police that this person can be telephoned night or day to report a crisis and to exchange relevant information that can be released. This person, in turn, will contact key people in the schools. Having accurate information from the police allows school personnel to quell rumors that frequently arise when a crisis occurs.

6. **Establish a media liaison and identify suitable facilities where reporters can work and news conferences can be held.**

Many school districts have a community or public relations spokesperson to whom all media requests are referred. Know who this person is, and communicate with him/her to establish procedures for responding to the media in times of crisis. If no district employee has this responsibility, work with your school board to designate a board member who will serve as the school's media liaison. Develop a relationship with that board member.

7. **Establish a working relationship with community health agencies and other resource groups.**

To facilitate quick and collaborative responses, strong relationships with community agencies must be established prior to a crisis. A list of suggested community support services is included in *Section V: Training Outlines*.

8. **Set up "phone trees."**

Critical information needs to be communicated as quickly as possible to those in need. The complexity of the phone tree will depend on the size of the community and its school system. A sample phone tree is included on p. 7.

9. **Plan to make space available for community meetings and for outside service providers involved in crisis management.**

Designate school sites and include potential alternative sites in the community when space is not available at the school.

10. **Develop necessary forms and information sheets.**

Develop record-keeping forms to assist in the management of crisis situations. You will need to translate any materials for families into languages appropriate for your school community. For examples of some useful forms, see *Section VI: Forms*.

11. **Develop a plan for emergency coverage of classes.**

Teachers who will play significant roles in a crisis response need to be assured that their classrooms will be covered.

12. **Establish a code to alert staff.**

Establish a code (a number, word, or phrase) that can be used over the public address system or in notes to alert staff as to the nature of a crisis without unduly alarming the rest of the school.

13. **Develop a collection of readings.**

The district office or school librarian should develop a bibliography of books pertinent to crisis situations for students and staff (see *References* for suggestions).

14. **Have school attorney review crisis response procedures and forms.**

Adjust procedures to comply with any liability concerns.

15. **Hold a practice "crisis alert" session.**

Prepare staff members for their responsibilities in a real crisis. Through role playing, staff can become aware of potential problems and discuss how to respond to them.

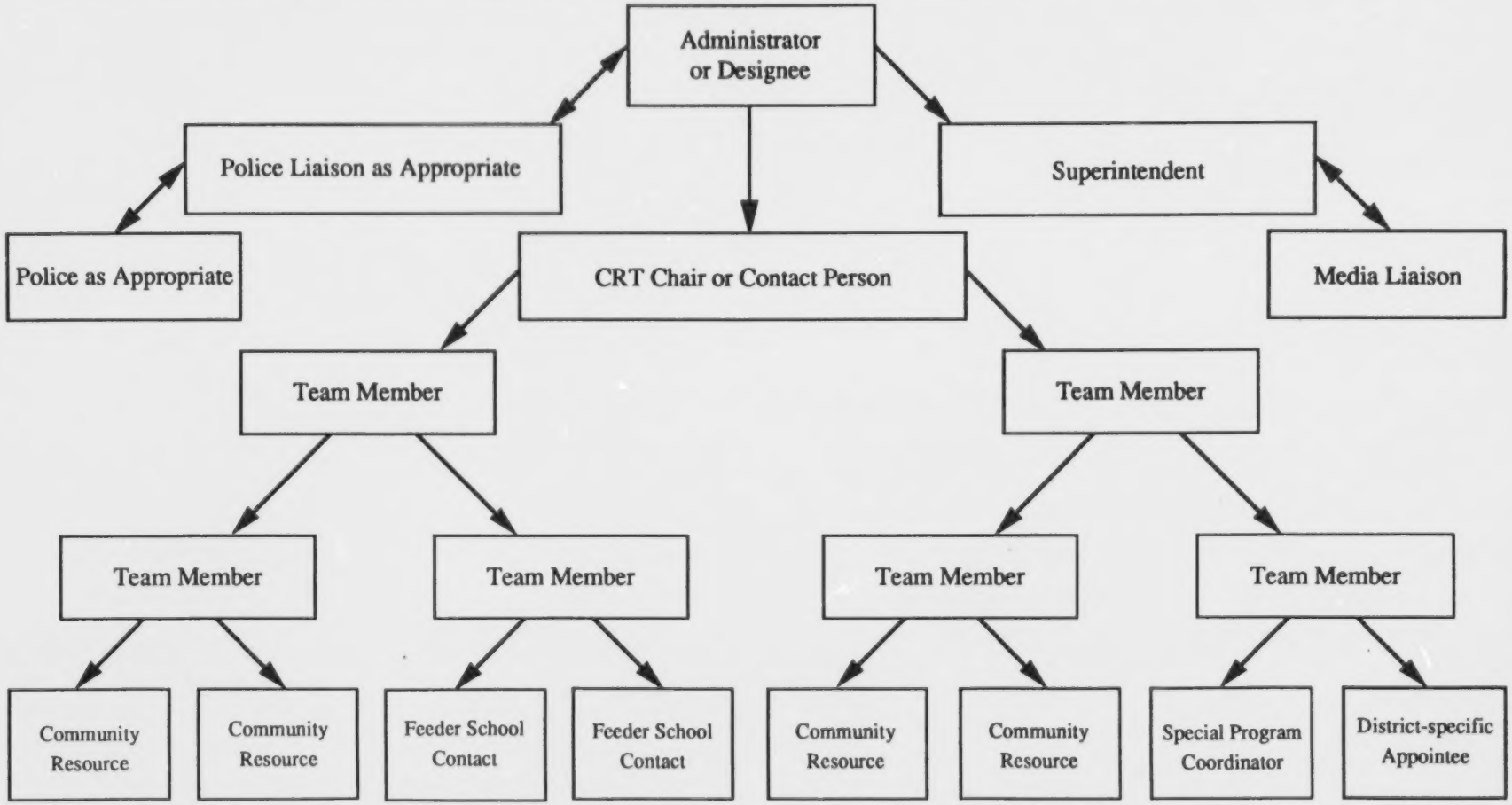
16. **Hold an annual in-service meeting on general crisis intervention.**

Annual in-service meetings need to be conducted for all school staff. Such in-service meetings should include information on building procedures, suicide, rape, and natural disasters. A suggested outline for this in-service is provided on p. 37.

Adapted with permission from *Phi Delta Kappan*, "Responding to Task Force on Adolescent Suicide"

PHONE TREE

Once it is verified that a crisis exists, the bulding administrator or designee sets the phone tree in motion. When a crisis occurs during weekends, vacation periods, or when a large number of staff is away from the school, it will be necessary to transmit information via a phone tree. At other times, when crises occur when school is in session, only the people outside the school building need to be contacted via telephone.



CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

- ❑ Define crisis for your school.
- ❑ Decide who will be in charge during a crisis.
- ❑ Select your Crisis Response Team.
- ❑ Develop appropriate policies and procedures for handling crisis situations:

  ❑ Before it happens ❑ When it happens ❑ Postcrisis follow-up
- ❑ Train the CRT.
- ❑ Establish a police liaison.
- ❑ Establish a media liaison and plan for contacting media.
- ❑ Establish a working relationship with community service providers and develop a list of telephone numbers and contact persons.
- ❑ Set up phone trees.
- ❑ Create or reserve space for service providers involved in crisis management and for community meetings.
- ❑ Develop and print forms to assist in crisis management.
- ❑ Develop a plan for emergency coverage of classes.
- ❑ Establish a code to alert staff.
- ❑ Develop a collection of readings.
- ❑ Obtain legal review of crisis response procedures and forms.
- ❑ Hold a practice crisis alert.
- ❑ Establish procedures for annual in-service of new staff and update/review for all staff.

SECTION III: SCHOOLWIDE CRISIS RESPONSE

Procedures for General Crisis Intervention

Unanticipated events, such as suicides, school bus crashes, natural disasters, or multiple injuries or deaths, can quickly escalate into a schoolwide catastrophe if not dealt with immediately and effectively. Knowing what to do if such a crisis occurs will minimize the chaos, rumors, and the impact of the event on the other students. As a reminder, for the purposes of this manual, crisis is defined as:

> **A sudden, generally unanticipated event that profoundly and negatively affects a significant segment of the school population and often involves serious injury or death.**

The following procedures should be implemented if a schoolwide crisis occurs. A General Crisis Intervention Checklist is provided at the end of this section to help you track the actions taken.

Immediately Following Notification of Crisis

The school administrator or designee should implement the following procedures when the school is notified of a near-death or fatal crisis situation:

1. Tell the person providing the information not to repeat it elsewhere in the school. Explain the school's need to verify the information and have any announcement of the event come from the designated school administrator. If there is concern regarding the likelihood of compliance with this request, it may be useful to keep the reporting person in the office (or have that person come in to the office if he or she called in the information) until appropriate steps can be taken.

2. Tell office staff members NOT to repeat or give out any information within or outside school until specifically instructed to do so. Have them direct all inquiries to the administrator or designee until told otherwise. In schools using student office help, it may be useful to request that only adults answer the school telephone for the remainder of the day.

3. In cases of reported student death, verify the reported incident by calling the police liaison or coroner. **DO NOT DISTURB THE AFFECTED STUDENT'S FAMILY.**

The timing of the notification of a crisis may alter the order of the initial steps taken. For example, if the school is notified in the morning, all procedures should be implemented on that day with

emergency faculty meetings scheduled for lunch and after school. If notification is received at night or on the weekend, ask the person providing the information not to spread the information further until the situation is verified, and proceed with # 3. Continue through the remaining general crisis intervention procedures, instructing office staff as appropriate (# 2) the following school day.

Following Verification of Crisis

The following actions are listed in a priority order. In actuality, several things will happen simultaneously. It is critical, however, that # 1-10 occur BEFORE THE PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT (# 11) IS MADE.

Once verification of a crisis has occurred, the administrator and/or CRT designee(s) must attend to the following:

1. Notify the superintendent or other appropriate district administrator of the event. Have that person notify the media liaison if necessary.

2. Convene the Crisis Response Team. To not unnecessarily alarm others, use the coded message developed for these situations (e.g., "CRT members, please report to room 5," or "A CRT meeting will convene in room 5 in 10 minutes").

3. Have an administrative assistant or other designee notify the school's social worker, psychologist, and/or counselors. If the affected student was in a special education or other special program, notify the appropriate program coordinator.

4. Assign CRT members in the building to locate, gather, and inform closest friends of the deceased/injured and provide support. **Pull this group together before the general announcement is made.** If significant others are absent or out of the building, assure that a knowledgeable, supportive adult gives the news to them. With parent or guardian consent, have these absent students transported to the school if practical and appropriate.

5. Prepare a formal statement for initial announcement to the entire school. Include minimum details and note that additional information will be forthcoming. A sample statement is included on p. 41. Also prepare statements for telephone inquiries.

6. Decide on a time for an emergency staff meeting and announce it over the public address system. Invite designated outside professionals to join the meeting to help staff members process their own reactions to the situation. A sample format for a staff meeting is on p. 35.

7. Identify students, staff, and parents likely to be most affected by the news (e.g., due to their relationship to the deceased/injured, recent or anticipated family losses, personal history with similar crisis, recent confrontations with the affected student). These persons are targeted for additional support.

8. Determine if additional district/community resources are needed—or are needed to "stand by"—to effectively manage the crisis, and notify them if appropriate.

9. Assign team members in the building to:

   a. Provide grief support for students in designated building areas. (Try to have more than one area available for this purpose.) Have the adults on duty in these areas keep lists of students they see. (Form B, p. 42). Make sure the parents/guardians of these students are notified regarding the impact of the event on their children.

   b. Review and distribute open-ended questions to help teachers with classroom discussion. A sample list of discussion questions and guidelines is included on Form C, p. 43.

   c. Stand in for any substitute teacher in the building or for any staff member unable or unwilling to deal with the situation during the announcement and subsequent discussion.

   d. Coordinate and greet all auxiliary support services staff members and take them to their assigned locations. Provide a sign-in/out sheet for them. See Form D, p. 44, for a sample.

   e. Distribute the developed list of community resources to all classes.

   f. Assign a counselor, psychologist, social worker, or other designated staff member to follow a deceased student's class schedule for the remainder of the day if that will be helpful to teachers of those classes.

10. Station staff/student support members as planned prior to making the announcement.

11. Announce the crisis over the public address system or by delivering a typed statement to every classroom teacher before the end of the period. Include locations of in-building support. See Form A, p. 41, for a sample announcement.

Once the announcement is made, assigned staff members will perform the following:

a. Monitor grounds for students leaving the building without permission. Redirect them to support services. If unable to intercept, notify a family member expressing the school's concern.

b. Notify parents of students closest to the deceased/injured and ask them to pick up their children at the end of the school day. Implement the evaluation plan previously developed to plan for masses of parents who will pick up their children.

c. Notify bus drivers—especially those who drive the buses usually traveled in by the injured or deceased student, or who are experiencing the most severe shock.

d. Notify feeder schools regarding siblings or other students predicted to be strongly affected.

e. Provide support to faculty and other staff members in the lounge. Provide private support to individual staff members identified in # 7.

f. Collect deceased student's belongings from his/her locker or other sites at the end of the day.

g. Officially withdraw a deceased student from the school attendance rolls.

The Staff Meeting

The school administrator and designated staff or community members must do the following at the first staff meeting during a school crisis:

a. Pass around a photograph of the deceased/injured student to familiarize staff with the student.

b. Review the facts of the crisis and dispel rumors.

c. Help staff members process their responses to the situation.

d. Describe the feelings that students may experience and suggest how teachers might handle specific situations.

e. Provide guidelines for helping students who are upset. See Form C, p. 43, for sample discussion questions and guidelines.

f. Encourage teachers to allow for expressions of grief, anger, etc., in the homeroom or class in which the announcement is received or in other classes throughout the day. Emphasize the acceptability/normalcy of a range of expressions. The guiding principle is to return to the normal routine as soon as possible within each class and within the school. The structure of routine provides security and comfort to all members of the school community.

g. Encourage staff to dispel rumors whenever possible and discourage any "glorification" of the event (especially in suicidal death).

h. Request staff to meet 30 minutes early the next morning to review procedures and debrief. If the crisis occurs on a Friday, call the meeting for the following Monday morning.

GENERAL CRISIS INTERVENTION CHECKLIST

- ❑ Direct staff and others not to repeat information until verification is obtained.
- ❑ Notify superintendent.
- ❑ Convene CRT and assign duties.
- ❑ Notify building support staff, such as counselors, psychologists, and/or social workers.
- ❑ Inform closest friends of the affected student and provide support.
- ❑ Prepare formal statement or announcement.
- ❑ Announce time and place of emergency staff meeting.
- ❑ Identify other/additional students, staff, and parents likely to be most affected by news.
- ❑ Assess need for additional community resources.
- ❑ Assign trained staff or community professionals to:
    - ❒ Provide grief support to students;
    - ❒ Review and distribute discussion questions to teachers;
    - ❒ Stand in for absent/affected/substitute teacher; and
    - ❒ Distribute lists of community resources.
- ❑ Make official announcement.
- ❑ Hold emergency staff meeting.
- ❑ As needed, assign team members and other staff to monitor grounds; notify parents, support staff, and feeder schools; provide support to staff; collect student belongings and withdraw student from school rolls.

Long-term Follow-up to Crisis Situations

The following information may be useful in the days and weeks following a crisis. Longer term follow-up procedures also are listed.

The Day After: Workday Two of Crisis Management

1. Gather faculty members and update them on any additional information/ procedures.

2. In case of death, provide funeral/visitation information if affected family has given permission.

3. Identify students in need of follow-up support and assign staff members to monitor each of these vulnerable students:

   a. coordinate any ongoing counseling support for students on campus;

   b. announce ongoing support for students with place, time, and staff facilitator; and

   c. notify parents of affected students regarding community resources available to students and their families.

4. Convene Crisis Response Team for debriefing as soon as possible:

   a. discuss successes and problems; and

   b. discuss things to do differently next time.

5. Allow staff an opportunity to discuss feelings and reactions.

Long-Term Follow-up and Evaluation

1. Provide list of suggested readings to teachers, parents, and students.

2. Amend crisis response procedures as necessary.

3. Write thank-you notes to out-of-building district and community resource people who provided (or are still providing) support during the crisis.

4. Be alert on crisis anniversaries and holidays. Often students will experience an "anniversary" grief reaction the following month or year on the date of the crisis, or when similar crises occur that remind them of the original crisis. Holidays, too, often are difficult for students who have experienced loss.

CHECKLIST FOR LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP

- ❑ Gather faculty for update.
- ❑ If acceptable to family, provide funeral information.
- ❑ Identify students requiring additional support and assign staff to monitor.
- ❑ Debrief with CRT.
- ❑ Provide opportunity for staff to discuss feelings and reactions.
- ❑ As appropriate, provide a list of suggested readings to teachers, parents, and students.
- ❑ Amend crisis response procedures as necessary.
- ❑ Monitor crisis anniversaries.

Suicide

A school's general response to a suicide does not differ markedly from a response to any sudden death crisis, and the procedures for General Crisis Intervention on p. 9 can appropriately be implemented. However, some issues exclusive to suicide require specific attention.

School administrators must allow students to grieve the loss of a peer without glorifying the method of death. Overemphasis of a suicide may be interpreted by vulnerable students as a glamorization of the suicidal act, which can assign legendary or idolized status to taking one's own life. The following "DOs" and "DON'Ts" will help school staff limit glamorization of suicide:

1. Do acknowledge the suicide as a tragic loss of life.

2. Do allow students to attend funeral services.

3. Do provide support services for students profoundly affected by the death.

4. Do *not* organize school assemblies to honor the deceased student.

5. Do *not* dedicate the yearbook or yearbook pages, newspaper articles, proms, athletic events, or advertisements to the deceased individual.

6. Do *not* pay tribute to a suicidal act by planting trees, hanging engraved plaques, or holding other memorial activities.

A suicide in the school community can heighten the likelihood, in the subsequent weeks, of "copycat" suicide attempts and threats among those especially vulnerable to the effects of a suicide. To prevent further tragedies, students considered to be especially susceptible to depression/suicide must be carefully monitored and appropriate action taken if they are identified as high risk. Because these efforts require a limited, rather than a schoolwide, response, they are described in *Section IV: Limited CRT Response.*

Information on myths and facts about suicide is included in *Section VII: Handouts for Staff.* Additional references on suicide are included in the *References.*

Natural Disaster

Each school district and school should have disaster prevention and response plans pertinent to an earthquake, flood, fire, hurricane, tornado, or other natural disasters common to the school district's region.

If you do not have such plans, contact your local county and/or state government agencies to receive information on recommended procedures for your particular area. In case of a natural disaster, it is important to have policies and guidelines regarding transportation, communication if telephone service is interrupted, and general first aid.

By definition, natural disasters affect the school community profoundly and immediately. This may result in limited or nonexistent access to school buildings and interruptions in telephone communication. *Within the context of existing district procedures* for such events, the following services should be implemented:

1. Convene the CRT by whatever means is available. Designate a place for the team to meet.

2. Prepare a formal statement for the initial announcement. Include minimum details and note that additional information will be forthcoming as soon as the extent of the crisis is established.

3. Decide on a time and location for an emergency staff meeting and announce it however possible. If appropriate outside professionals are available, invite them to join the meeting to help staff members process their own reactions to the situation so they will be better able to help students and families.

4. As soon as information is available, identify students, staff, and families likely to be most gravely affected by the disaster.

5. Determine the need for additional district/community resources (including the need for them to stand by) and their availability to effectively manage the crisis. If appropriate, attempt to notify them.

6. Assign team members or other trained, available staff or community professionals to:

    a. Provide grief support for students in designated areas. Have the adults on duty keep lists of students they see (see Form B, p. 42). Make sure parents/guardians of these students are notified regarding the impact of the event on their children.

    b. Develop and distribute open-ended questions to help teachers discuss the situation with their students (see Form C, p. 43).

    c. Stand in for any substitute teacher(s) in the building at the time of the disaster, or for any other staff member unable to deal with the situation, during the announcements and subsequent discussions.

    d. Monitor grounds for students leaving the area without permission. Redirect them to support services. If unable to intercept, notify a family member expressing your concern. If inoperable telephone lines prohibit you from contacting the family, keep a list of these students and pertinent information until communication is restored.

e. Distribute lists of community resources to all students. A list of suggested resources is contained in *Section V: Training Outlines*.

f. Coordinate and greet outside resource and disaster response workers and take them to appropriate meeting spot(s). Provide a sign-in/out sheet. See Form D on p. 44.

g. If a disaster resulted in student deaths, collect belongings from the student's locker or other sites as soon as possible. Withdraw deceased student's name from official school rolls. Follow other procedures applicable to student deaths (see Procedures for General Crisis Intervention, p. 9) as soon as practical.

h. As soon as possible, disseminate follow-up information to families to help them cope with the aftermath of the disaster. Materials should be translated into languages appropriate to your school's families.

When a natural disaster occurs, organize school staff response by assuring that the actions on the following page are taken.

NATURAL DISASTER CHECKLIST

- ❑ Designate a meeting place and convene building CRT to whatever extent possible.
- ❑ Prepare formal statement on disaster status.
- ❑ Schedule and announce time and location for emergency staff meeting.
- ❑ Identify most gravely affected students, staff, and families.
- ❑ Determine need for outside resource people and notify as appropriate.
- ❑ Assign trained staff or community professionals to:
  - ❑ Provide grief support;
  - ❑ Develop and distribute discussion questions to teachers;
  - ❑ Stand in for absent/affected/substitute teachers;
  - ❑ Monitor school grounds and contact families of missing students or students leaving without permission; and
  - ❑ Distribute lists of community resources and follow-up information.
- ❑ Follow procedures applicable to student death if needed.

SECTION IV: LIMITED CRT RESPONSE

Crises Requiring Limited School Involvement

In certain crisis situations, a schoolwide response would be excessive and unnecessarily impact students. In other instances, police involvement may limit the school's ability to respond to the incident.

When suicide risk is present, or when attempted suicide or rape has occurred, a *limited response* by trained school staff and/or the CRT should be all that is necessary to contain potential panic and reduce further risks. While these situations do not, of themselves, constitute a schoolwide crisis, inappropriate responses to these events can lead to chaos. In the case of a homicide or riot, a limited school-based response may be all that is possible due to law enforcement intervention.

The following pages describe effective crisis responses in situations requiring limited school involvement if the crisis occurs during the summer or school year.

Crises Occurring During Summer or Off-track

If a school administrator or other CRT team member is notified of a crisis during the summer (or when affected students are off-track if they attend year-round schools), the response usually will be one of limited school involvement. In that case, the following steps should be taken:

1. Institute the phone tree to disseminate information to CRT team members and request a meeting of all available members.

2. Identify close friends/staff most likely to be affected by the crisis. Keep the list and recheck it when school reconvenes.

3. Notify staff or families of students identified in # 2 and recommend community resources for support.

4. Notify general faculty/staff by letter or telephone with appropriate information.

5. Schedule faculty meeting for an update the week before students return to school.

6. Be alert for repercussions among students and staff. When school reconvenes, recheck core group of friends and other at-risk students and staff, and institute appropriate support mechanisms and referral procedures.

Crises that occur during vacation or when students are off-track require fewer responses from the school. Use the checklist on the following page to ensure that no steps are forgotten.

OFF-TRACK/SUMMER CRISIS INTERVENTION CHECKLIST

- ❑ Institute the phone tree to inform CRT members.
- ❑ Identify and make a list of students and staff members most likely to be affected.
- ❑ Notify staff members or families of students identified and recommend community resource people who can provide support.
- ❑ Notify remaining staff with appropriate information by letter or telephone.
- ❑ Schedule faculty meeting for an update before affected students return to school.
- ❑ When school reconvenes, monitor students and staff members previously identified.
- ❑ Make appropriate referrals for students or staff members who need additional help.

Suicide Attempts

When a school becomes aware that a student or staff member attempted suicide, the school must protect that person's right to privacy. Should a parent or other family member notify the school of a student's suicide attempt, the family should be referred to appropriate community agencies for support services. Staff response should be focused on quelling the spread of rumors and minimizing the fears of fellow students and staff. As opposed to convening a CRT meeting and alerting the student body, any services provided to the person who attempted suicide must be kept confidential and coordinated with outside service providers, such as a suicide crisis counselor or hospital emergency team.

A SUICIDE ATTEMPT BECOMES A CRISIS TO BE MANAGED BY SCHOOL STAFF ONLY WHEN ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS EXIST:

1. Rumors and myths are widespread and damaging.

2. Students witness police action or emergency services response.

3. A group of the attempt survivor's friends are profoundly affected by the suicide attempt and request support.

When one or more of the above conditions exists, the following should be implemented:

1. Tell the person providing the information about the suicide attempt not to repeat it elsewhere in the school.

2. If school office staff members heard the report, tell them not to repeat or give out any information within or outside school unless they are specifically told to do so.

3. Have the Crisis Response Team member closest to the survivor talk to the most profoundly affected friends and determine the type of support they need.

4. Provide space in the school for the identified peers to receive support services. Provide necessary passes to release these students from class to receive services.

School Reentry for a Student Who Has Attempted Suicide

Efforts to respond to suicide attempts and other traumas should be focused on making the student's return to school a comfortable one. Because families exposed to a suicide attempt experience

considerable guilt and fear, they are more likely to disclose that a daughter or son has made an attempt if they know the school has a helpful, nonthreatening manner of dealing with suicide.

Because a student who attempted suicide often is at greater risk for suicide in the months following the crisis, it is extremely important to closely monitor his or her reentry into school and to maintain close contact with parents and mental health professionals working with that student.

Assuming the student will be absent from one to four weeks after a suicide attempt and possibly hospitalized in a treatment facility, your school should follow these steps:

1. Obtain a written release of information form signed by the parents. This makes it possible for confidential information to be shared between school personnel and treatment providers.

2. Inform the student's teachers regarding the number of probable days of absence.

3. Instruct teachers to provide the student with assignments to be completed, if appropriate.

4. Maintain contact with the student to keep him/her informed of the latest developments in the school, if appropriate.

5. Seek recommendations for aftercare from the student's therapist. If the student has been hospitalized, a Crisis Response Team member should attend the discharge meeting at the hospital.

6. The CRT member should convey relevant nonconfidential information to appropriate school staff regarding the aftercare plan.

7. Once the student returns to school, a CRT member should maintain regular contact with him/her.

8. The school should maintain contact with the parents, provide progress reports and other appropriate information, and be kept informed of any changes in the aftercare plan.

Monitor any school intervention in a suicide attempt with the following checklist.

SUICIDE ATTEMPT CHECKLIST

- ❑ School involvement regarding the incident is due to:
  - ❑ Rumors and myths that are widespread and damaging;
  - ❑ Police action/emergency services witnessed by students; and
  - ❑ Survivor's friends requesting intervention.
- ❑ Information providers/recipients enjoined not to repeat information elsewhere.
- ❑ Steps taken to protect attempt survivor's right to privacy.
- ❑ Action taken to quell rumors.
- ❑ CRT member closest to attempt survivor met with friends to determine support needed.
- ❑ Space provided on site for identified peers to receive support services.
- ❑ School reentry procedures followed.
- ❑ All records related to incident and services provided stored in confidential file.

Suicidal Risk

Students at risk for suicide are increasingly common. Because suicide rarely happens without *some* warning to *someone*, staff and faculty need to take all comments about suicidal thoughts seriously, especially if details of a suicide plan are shared.

When a student is considered to be at risk for suicide, a parent or guardian must be contacted and involved from the outset. Any time the risk of suicide exists, the situation must be managed by an appropriately trained CRT member or other trained district professional, such as a school psychologist, counselor, or social worker. **Under no circumstances should an untrained person attempt to assess the severity of suicidal risk;** all assessments of threats, attempts, or other risk factors must be left to the appropriate professionals.

In cases of suicidal risk, the school should maintain a confidential record of actions taken. This will help assure that appropriate assessment, monitoring, and support are provided to the designated student and, should she or he commit a suicide later, such records will document the school's efforts to intervene and protect the student. For districts lacking appropriate risk assessment instruments, sample forms are usually available from reputable community resources. A monitoring form can be based on something as simple as the checklist on the following page. Again, such forms do not stand alone. Any assessment of suicidal risk must be undertaken by a qualified professional.

Document your monitoring of a student at risk for suicide by checking off the following appropriate actions taken.

SUICIDAL RISK CHECKLIST

- ❒ School administrator notified.
- ❒ Parent/guardian notified or emergency contact notified.
- ❒ Mental health service provider (on site or external) notified and severity assessment requested.
- ❒ Other actions taken (specify):

_____

_____

_____

Rape

When a school is notified that a rape has occurred to a student or staff member, the CRT and the school must protect the identity and right to privacy of the rape survivor and of the alleged perpetrator. News of the incident should be contained as much as possible. Appropriate response by school staff will be directed at minimizing the fears of fellow students and quelling the spread of rumors. As opposed to convening a CRT meeting and alerting the student body, services provided to the victim and her/his family should be kept confidential and should be coordinated with outside service providers, such as a rape crisis team or hospital emergency team.

RAPE ONLY BECOMES A CRISIS TO BE MANAGED BY SCHOOL STAFF WHEN ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS EXIST:

- The rape occurs on campus.
- A member of the rape survivor's family requests school intervention.
- The rape survivor's friends requests intervention.
- Rumors and myths are widespread and damaging.
- Students witness police action or emergency services response.

When one or more of the above conditions exists, the following should be implemented:

1. Direct the person providing the information not to repeat it elsewhere in the school.
2. If the rape occurred on campus, notify the appropriate law enforcement office and/or local rape crisis team.
3. If office staff members heard the report, tell them not to repeat or give out any information within or outside school unless they are specifically told to do so.
4. Designate the CRT member closest to the victim to talk to her/him about the types of support he or she and the closest friends need, and the person(s) the rape survivor would like to provide that support.
5. Provide space in the school for the rape survivor and identified peers to receive support services. Provide necessary passes to release these students from class to receive services.

Rape is a crime of violence. For the rape survivor, it often is an experience of fear, loss of control, humiliation, and violation. Rape survivors may experience a full range of emotional reactions. It is extremely beneficial for rape survivors to seek emotional support regarding the assault.

Monitor any school intervention in a rape incident with the following checklist.

RAPE RESPONSE CHECKLIST

- ❑ School involvement in incident is due to:
  - ❑ Rape occurrence on campus;
  - ❑ Survivor's family requests school intervention;
  - ❑ Survivor's friends request intervention;
  - ❑ Rumors and myths are widespread and damaging; and/or
  - ❑ Students witness police action/emergency services.
- ❑ Information provider/recipients enjoined not to repeat information elsewhere.
- ❑ Steps taken to protect survivor's identity and right to privacy.
- ❑ Law enforcement and rape crisis agency notified if appropriate.
- ❑ CRT member closest to victim designated to talk with student and determine type of support and support provider desired.
- ❑ Rape survivor encouraged to seek additional support from community rape crisis agency.
- ❑ Space provided on site for rape survivor and identified peers to receive support services.
- ❑ School services coordinated as appropriate and legal with outside service providers.
- ❑ Action taken to quell rumors.
- ❑ All records related to rape incident and services provided stored in confidential file.

Homicide

When they involve students or staff members, homicides powerfully affect school populations. However, because of police involvement, immediate response may be largely out of the hands of school personnel. **As such, communication with the school's police liaison should be the first priority.**

It is important to realize that actions taken by law enforcement may precede, interrupt, or initially preclude the implementation of your usual crisis response procedures. When this is the case, school staff may want to "backtrack" in the aftermath and implement general crisis intervention procedures and long-term follow-up procedures included in *Section III: Schoolwide Crisis Response*.

Likewise, if a homicide occurs on or close to school grounds—and particularly if it is witnessed by students—the Procedures for General Crisis Intervention (p. 9) can appropriately be followed. Crisis response in these situations is designed to contain panic, prevent chaos, ensure safety, and provide support to those students and staff affected most significantly.

As in the case of a natural disaster, one of the primary responses to a homicide is fear. Students will fear for their own safety and the safety of peers and family. At these times, many of the suggestions found in the After the Disaster (p. 51) and Emotional First Aid in Times of Disaster (p. 52) handouts will be helpful.

The school's response to a student or staff member's homicide largely depends on the role law enforcement officials take, so instructions from police have priority over the suggested actions on the following page.

HOMICIDE CHECKLIST

- ❑ Communicate with police liaison for clarification and instructions.
- ❑ Notify district superintendent.
- ❑ Notify district media liaison or school board member.
- ❑ Quell rumors.
- ❑ Notify building counselors, psychologists, and/or social workers.

With police approval:

- ❑ Convene CRT and assign duties.
- ❑ Inform closest friends of the deceased and provide support.
- ❑ Prepare formal announcement or written statement.
- ❑ Identify students, staff, and parents likely to be most affected by news.
- ❑ Announce time and place of emergency staff meeting.
- ❑ Assess need for additional community resources.
- ❑ Assign trained staff or community professional to:
  - ❑ Provide grief support to students;
  - ❑ Review and distribute discussion questions to teachers;
  - ❑ Stand in for absent/affected/substitute teacher; and
  - ❑ Distribute lists of community resources.
- ❑ Make official announcement.
- ❑ Hold emergency staff meeting.
- ❑ As needed, assign team members and other staff to monitor grounds; notify parents, support staff, and feeder schools; provide support to staff; collect student belongings and withdraw student's name from school rolls.
- ❑ Implement long term follow-up procedures on p. 15.

Riots

Whether or not riots have occurred in your district, it is wise to consider and prepare for them. Few districts have a riot response plan, so you may want to contact districts where riots have occurred and get information from them.

There are three general kinds of riots: student riots on campus, riots by strangers on campus, and riots in the surrounding community. Crisis response procedures will vary in each case and should be developed in conjunction with your local law enforcement officials. **In any case, contacting the police must be your first action.**

Once you have notified the police, you may need to take emergency actions to ensure the safety of students and staff members while awaiting police arrival. Depending upon circumstances, students may need to be gathered into classrooms behind closed doors or they may need to be evacuated. In the latter case, follow normal evacuation procedures, taking students to a predetermined safe area.

Once the immediate danger is past and police permit staff follow-up, you may want to convene the CRT to assess the need for support procedures and services. When riots result in serious injury or death to members of the school community, the Procedures for General Crisis Intervention (p. 9) can appropriately be followed. Staff members or community professionals may need to provide emotional assistance for students or distribute questions to assist teachers with classroom discussions. The CRT may want to pay particular attention to media coverage of the event, and the district or school media liaison may need to work with the media to defuse the situation.

If local law enforcement personnel includes individuals especially trained in riot response, it may be helpful to you and to them to have one of these individuals participate in your staff in-service training or speak at a faculty meeting.

A riot checklist is included on the following page.

RIOT CHECKLIST

- ❑ Contact police department.
- ❑ Ensure safety of students and staff members.
- ❑ Notify families if appropriate.
- ❑ Work with media to defuse the impact of the riot.

Postriot —when the danger is over:

- ❑ If serious injury or death to students or staff, follow Procedures for General Crisis Intervention on p. 9.
- ❑ If no serious injury or death to students or staff and school is profoundly affected by riots, convene CRT to:
  - ❑ Identify students who need support;
  - ❑ Assess the need for additional community resource people; and
  - ❑ Develop and distribute discussion questions for teachers.
- ❑ Schedule staff meeting.
- ❑ Hold staff meeting to debrief, and provide accurate information, update on vulnerable students, and opportunity to process feelings.

SECTION V: TRAINING OUTLINES

Training for Crisis Management

All staff members have a role to play in crisis management, and appropriate training will help them fulfill their roles more capably. The type and amount of training a staff member should receive will depend upon that person's anticipated responsibilities. Crisis Response Team members, for example, require broader and more intensive training related to specific types of crises and preparation for collaborative efforts with various community agencies. General staff members need basic awareness information in several areas and a thorough briefing on school procedures.

Both CRT training and staff in-servicing provide an opportunity for the school to avail itself of expertise within the local community. Community individuals and agencies will be your allies in crisis response; begin establishing or affirming these relationships by using community service providers as presenters during the training phase of your crisis management process.

The following outlines suggest training topics for both staff and CRT training. Where there is a student assistance program or emergency response team in place, much of the suggested information may already have been provided to team members and/or general staff. In these cases, a "refresher" on content will be sufficient, and greater attention can be paid to crisis response procedures. For other districts, this training will be a new effort, and emphasis will need to be placed on content. Once a Crisis Response Team is selected and trained, the team members may want to survey staff members to assess their existing expertise and training needs before planning the staff in-service training.

SUGGESTED TRAINING TOPICS FOR CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

I. Introduction

II. School-site Crisis Management Plan

A. Managing crisis
   1. Before it happens
   2. When it happens
   3. Postcrisis follow-up
   4 Delegating responsibilities
   5. Reviewing policies and procedures

B. Preventing escalation of rumors
   1. School gossip
   2. Media procedures
   3. Dealing with outsiders

C. Managing grief and loss
   1. Stages of grief
   2. Anniversary and holiday reactions to crisis

D. Legal issues
   1. *En loco parentis*
   2. Confidentiality—"gossip factor"
   3. Negligence/liability

E. Taking care of the caretakers
   1. Helping the staff personally manage the crisis
   2. Self-care for team members

F. Community referrals
   1. Where to go for help
   2. Getting the referral system in place
   3. Maintaining the community linkages

III. Suicide and Suicidal Risk

A. Extent of problem

B. Personal attitudes and experiences with suicide

C. Myths and facts

D. Identifying those at risk
   1. Students most vulnerable
   2. Emotional and behavioral warning signs

E. Dealing with a suicidal student
   1. Intervening with student
   2. Obtaining emergency assistance

F. Community resources available

G. Discussion and questions

IV. Rape

A. Extent of problem

B. Facts and myths

C. Dealing with the rape survivor

D. Issues of confidentiality

E. Community resources available

F. Discussion and questions

V. Natural Disasters

A. First aid training
   1. Assessment of existing skills
   2. Need for further training

B. Review of crisis plan

C. Interface with local disaster relief agencies

D. Discussion and questions

VI. Other Crises (e.g., riots, gang violence, homicide)

A. Local risk of _____

B. Coordination with local law enforcement

C. Alterations in crisis management plan

D. Community resources available

VII. Closing Discussion and Questions

SUGGESTED TRAINING TOPICS FOR ALL-STAFF IN-SERVICE

I. Introduction

II. School-site Crisis Management Plan

- A. School procedures for handling crisis
- B. Individuals/CRT responsible for organizing crisis response

III. Suicide

- A. Myths and facts
- B. Emotional and behavioral warning signs
- C. Referral procedures
- D. Legal issues
  1. *En loco parentis*
  2. Confidentiality
  3. Liability
- E. Discussion/questions

IV. Rape

- A. Facts and myths
- B. School procedures
  1. Confidentiality
  2. Referral
- C. Discussion and questions

V. Natural Disasters

- A. First aid
- B. Review of school procedures
- C. Discussion/questions

VI. Other Crises (as necessary or requested)

VII. Closing Discussion and Questions

COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

It is important to establish a list of available community resources prior to the onset of a crisis. Many school districts already have a community resource publication that includes the types of help listed below. If you do not have such a guide, the following format may be used as an example of telephone numbers you'll want to have.

The list you make available should contain the name of the agency or provider, telephone number, and contact person(s) prepared to work with the school during a crisis. Ideally, each of these service providers should have at least one in-person contact from a CRT member or other designated staff.

I. Emergency Assistance

A. Mental health
B. Shelter/housing
C. Food/clothing
D. Child protective services
E. Emergency Family Assistance (EFA)
F. Disaster relief
G. Medical

II. Counseling Services (Nonprofit, community agencies)

A. Child
B. Family
C. Alcohol and other drugs
D. Rape
E. Hospice or other death and dying resource
F. Survivors of suicide
G. Posttraumatic stress

III. Health Services/Clinics

A. Medical and dental
B. Hospital—medical
C. Hospital—psychiatric

IV. Hotlines

A. Crisis
B. Suicide
C. Rape
D. Child abuse
E. Sexual abuse
F. Other community hotlines

V. **Self-help Groups**

A. Alcoholics Anonymous
B. Al-Anon/Alateen
C. Parent support
D. Other self-help groups

VI **Law Enforcement**

A. Police
B. Probation

VII. **Social Services and Child Welfare**

A. Department of children's services
B. Department of mental health
C. Other departments

VIII. **Bilingual/Bicultural Resources**

A. Translators
B. Programs
C. Agencies

IX. **Other**

SECTION VI: FORMS

The following forms are included in this section:

A. Sample Statement for Initial Announcement of Crisis Event

B. Students Receiving Counseling Support

C. Open-ended Questions for Classroom Discussion

D. CRT Community Support Services Record Sheet

FORM A

Sample Statement for Initial Announcement of Crisis Event

TO:

FROM:

"We have just been advised of a tragedy involving a member(s) of our school. I am sad to announce that _____ has died/has been in a serious accident. As soon as we have more information, we will pass it on to you. People will be available in the building to help those of you who need extra support in dealing with this situation. Your teachers will advise you of the location and times available for this support.

"As soon as we know the family's/families' wishes regarding_____, we will share that information with you. We ask that all students remain in their classrooms and adhere to their regular schedules."

FORM B

CONFIDENTIAL ***CONFIDENTIAL***

Students Receiving Counseling Support

School _____ **Administrator** _____

Date	Name	Grade	Reason Seen	Referred By	Staff Member /Professional Intervening	Follow-up Needed Y or N

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FORM C

Open-ended Questions for Classroom Discussion

1. What was it like for you when you heard the news?

2. Did/will you discuss it at home? How did it go?/How do you think it will go?

3. If you were a member of _____'s family, what do you think you would want at a time like this?

4. How can you students help each other through this?

5. What other losses have you experienced?

6. What do we know about how (cultural group) respond to this type of loss? How can we respond in ways that are culturally respectful?

FORM D

CRT Community Support Services Record Sheet

Date	Name and Office/School/Agency/ Organization	Telephone Number	School Building Contact Person	Sign-out Time

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SECTION VII: HANDOUTS FOR STAFF

Supplementary Handouts

The following pages include a variety of handouts that can be used during staff training. Guidelines are provided for classroom discussion in the aftermath of a crisis, suggestions for appropriate teacher responses to a student's death, and important pointers for dealing with a student threatening suicide. Additional information on suicide and reminders on postdisaster self-care for adults and emotional support of students is included.

While not specifically intended for teachers, the handouts in *Section VIII: Handouts for Families* also may be of interest to staff. Additional references for resource materials are included in the *References*.

Classroom Discussion Guidelines

The following list provides guidelines for classroom discussions related to a school crisis. Teachers may want to use the open-ended questions provided at the bottom of the page to help them structure discussion following the announcement of a crisis situation.

1. Review the facts and dispel rumors.

2. If a suicide occurs, discuss facts and myths about suicide (pp. 49 - 50).

3. Inform students of locations for grief support.

4. Encourage students to express their reactions in a way that is appropriate for them, and affirm the appropriateness of *all* responses from severe upset to no visible reaction whatsoever.

5. Discuss possible guilt feelings or feelings of responsibility.

6. Discuss students' possible fears for their safety and that of their peers and siblings.

7. Ask students to support one another and to escort any friend who needs additional help to one of the designated locations for grief support.

8. Reassure students that any adult in the building is available to help.

9. Allow students to discuss other losses they have experienced. Help them understand this loss often brings up past losses; this is a normal occurrence.

10. Encourage students to discuss their feelings with their parents/families.

Suggested Questions

1. What was it like for you when you heard the news?

2. Did/will you discuss it at home? How did it go?/How do you think it will go?

3. If you were a member of _____'s family, what do you think you would want at a time like this?

4. How can you students help each other through this?

5. What other losses have you experienced?

6. What thoughts and feelings does this bring up for you?

Guidelines for Responding to a Student's Death

1. React to the student's death. Share your reactions with the class.

2. Let the students talk and write about their feelings.

3. Listen to what students have to say. It is important not to shut off discussion.

4. If the student died of an illness and it is appropriate to do so, discuss the illness. This is especially useful for younger children who may need to separate the illness of the child who died from any medical problems his or her classmates experience.

5. Never tell young children, "God took Sally away because He loves her," because children will wonder if it's a good idea to be loved by God. Likewise, don't say, "Sally went to sleep." You may create a class of children afraid to go to sleep.

6. A "regular" day may be too hard for grieving students. Offer choices of activities, such as letters, journals, and discussions.

7. If the students want to, let them write sympathy notes to the parents or to a student who has suffered a loss. Provide an address or offer to deliver them.

8. If acceptable to the affected family, make sure that funeral times are well publicized, perhaps including ideas on funeral etiquette.

9. If applicable, share any cultural information related to the meaning of death and death observances that will help students understand and respond comfortably to affected family members.

10. Talk with students about their concerns regarding "what to say" to other bereaved students and the family of the deceased. Emphasize that trying to avoid grieving individuals or being overly solicitous to them will not help. Students should be themselves and share their caring feelings and support. Point out the need to resume normal relationships.

11. Remember that your class may remain quiet and depressed for some time after the death (perhaps even a month), and that some students may begin to act out noisily and physically as a method of dealing with their feelings.

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DOs and DON'Ts Related to Suicidal Threats

The publications of many organizations and governmental agencies contain advice for people who want to help suicidal youngsters. That advice is summarized below.

DOs

LISTEN to what the student is saying and take her/his suicidal threat seriously. Many times a student may be looking for just that assurance.

OBSERVE the student's nonverbal behavior. In children and adolescents, facial expressions, body language, and other concrete signs often are more telling than what the student says.

ASK whether the student is really thinking about suicide. If the answer is "yes," ask how she/he plans to do it and what steps have already been taken. This will convince the student of your attention and let you know how serious the threat is.

GET HELP by contacting an appropriate CRT member. Never attempt to handle a potential suicide by yourself.

STAY with the student. Take the student to a CRT member and stay with that student for awhile. The student has placed trust in you, so you must help transfer that trust to the other person.

DON'Ts

DON'T leave the student alone for even a minute.

DON'T act shocked or be sworn to secrecy.

DON'T underestimate or brush aside a suicide threat ("You won't really do it; you're not the type"), or try to shock or challenge the student ("Go ahead. Do it."). The student may already feel rejected and unnoticed, and you should not add to that burden.

DON'T let the student convince you that the crisis is over. The most dangerous time is precisely when the person seems to be feeling better. Sometimes, after a suicide method has been selected, the student may appear happy and relaxed. You should, therefore, stay involved until you get help.

DON'T take too much upon yourself. Your responsibility to the student in a crisis is limited to listening, being supportive, and getting her/him to a trained professional. Under no circumstances should you attempt to counsel the student.

Myths and Facts About Suicide

MYTH: **People who talk about suicide don't commit suicide.**
FACT: Most people who commit suicide have given clues of some type to one or more people. It is not safe to assume that someone talking about suicide will not attempt it; the majority of those who attempt suicide have stated their intent to someone.

MYTH: **Suicide happens without warning.**
FACT: While explicit verbal warnings are not always given, there are clues ahead of time. The difficulty is that not everyone recognizes the signs and symptoms that would alert him/her to the possibility of suicide.

MYTH: **Suicidal people are fully intent on dying.**
FACT: Rather than specifically wanting to die, students who attempt/commit suicide often do so simply because they have exhausted their coping skills and see no other options for relief from pain.

MYTH: **Once suicidal, a person is suicidal forever.**
FACT: Preoccupation with suicidal thoughts is usually time-limited. Most young people who work through a suicidal crisis can go on to lead healthy lives.

MYTH: **Once a person attempts suicide, the humiliation and pain will prevent future attempts.**
FACT: Eighty percent of persons who commit suicide have made at least one prior attempt (Hafen & Frandsen, 1986). It is critical that concerned adults and peers monitor a student who has attempted suicide for several months following the attempt. Those students who receive help for their suicidal risk before they have made an attempt have a better prognosis than those who were intervened upon following an attempted suicide.

MYTH: **Suicide occurs more often among the wealthy.**
FACT: Suicide knows no socioeconomic boundaries.

MYTH: **Suicidal behavior is inherited.**
FACT: As with other patterns of behavior, suicide sometimes seems to run in families. However, suicide is not a genetic trait, so it is not inherited. What can appear to be a family trait of suicide may be because family members share a common emotional environment and often adopt similar methods of coping. In a family where someone has committed suicide, suicide may be viewed as acceptable in times of distress.

MYTH: **People who attempt or commit suicide are mentally ill/psychotic.**

FACT: Many suicidal persons historically have had difficulty in working through problems. Other people who attempt or commit suicide choose it as an option when their previously successful means of coping are not effective, and they are unable to otherwise stop the pain they are experiencing. A history of mental illness does increase the risk of suicide.

MYTH: **Talking about suicide can encourage a person to attempt it.**

FACT: On the contrary, initiating a discussion of suicidal feelings may give a suicidal adolescent permission to talk about the pain she/he is experiencing and, by so doing, provide significant relief. It is highly unlikely that discussing suicide would influence a nonsuicidal person to become preoccupied with the idea.

MYTH: **People who attempt suicide just want attention.**

FACT: Suicide should be considered a "cry for help." Persons overwhelmed by pain may be unable to let others know they need help, and suicide may seem the best way to relieve the pain. Suicidal behavior may be a desperate move to reach out for much needed help.

MYTH: **Suicide is most likely to occur at night as well as over the holiday season.**

FACT: Suicides can occur at any time, regardless of season, time of day or night, weather, or holidays. Childhood and adolescent suicides, however, are most likely to occur in the spring, and second most likely to occur in the fall. Most childhood and adolescent suicides occur at home on weekends or between the hours of 3 p.m. and midnight (Eyeman, 1987; Indiana State Board of Health, 1985).

MYTH: **When depression lifts, there is no longer any danger of suicide.**

FACT: This is a dangerous misconception. The lifting of depression often accompanies the development of a suicide plan and the final decision to commit suicide. If the improvement in mood is sudden and circumstances have not changed, the risk of suicide remains high.

After the Disaster

Having just experienced the shock and pain of the disaster, you will be busy for the next few days or weeks. Caring for your immediate needs, perhaps finding a new place to stay, planning for cleanup and repairs, and filing claim forms may occupy the majority of your time. As the immediate shock wears off, you will start to rebuild and put your life back together. We may all experience some normal reactions as a result of the disaster. Generally, these feelings don't last long, but it is common to feel let down and resentful many months after the event. Some feelings or responses may not appear until weeks or months after the disaster. Common responses are:

- Irritability/anger
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Inability to sleep
- Nightmares
- Sadness
- Headaches or nausea
- Hyperactivity
- Lack of concentration
- Increased alcohol or other drug consumption

Many victims of disaster will have at least one of these responses. Acknowledging your feelings and stress is the first step in feeling better. Other helpful things to do include:

- Talk about your disaster experiences. Sharing your feelings will help you feel better about what happened.
- Take time off from cares, worries, and home repairs. Take time for recreation, relaxation, or a favorite hobby. Getting away from home for a day or spending a few hours with close friends can help.
- Pay attention to your health, to a good diet, and adequate sleep. Relaxation exercises may help if you have difficulty sleeping.
- Prepare for possible emergencies to help lessen feelings of helplessness and bring peace of mind.
- Rebuild personal relationships in addition to repairing other aspects of your life. Couples should make time to be alone together, both to talk and to have fun.

If stress, anxiety, depression, or physical problems continue, you may wish to contact the postdisaster services provided by the local mental health center.

Please take this sheet with you today and reread it over the next few weeks and months. Being aware of your feelings and sharing them with others is an important part of recovery and feeling normal again soon.

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Emotional First Aid in Times of Disaster

As an outgrowth of almost any disaster, individuals who experienced a crisis are likely to present a variety of psychological reactions. Once the major crisis has subsided and the immediate physical safety needs have been met, the psychological needs of these persons must be addressed.

It is the school staff and CRT who may be left alone to handle a disastrous situation for the first 72 hours before additional help arrives. Due to the nature of disastrous situations, disaster workers have noted that individuals who live in areas frequently hit by earthquakes, tornados or floods, and who have made preparations for impending danger suffer the same initial reactions as others. However, they adjust better in a problem-solving way to the recovery needs.

The following descriptions of children's basic needs, as well as suggestions for meeting them, will help school personnel deal with children's reactions to a natural disaster.

Children and adults need facts.
Explain the disaster: what it is, and how and when it happens. Prepare students for aftershocks or other after effects. Remind students that only certain areas may have been affected.

Children and adults need opportunities to share feelings and experiences.
Children and adults need opportunities to talk and share their feelings and experiences; talking helps diminish anxieties. Adults need to admit to their own feelings so children will have "permission" to share theirs. Drawing what the earthquake or other event looks like and describing the pictures may help get at unexpressed feelings.

Children need to be together with adults and family members.
Children are not as fearful of their own safety as they are of being separated from their parents and not knowing if they are safe or if they will see them again. Let students know that parents will get to them as soon as possible. In the meantime, assure students they will be cared for. Implement a buddy system with classmates. DO NOT LEAVE CHILDREN ALONE.

Children need to be engaged in activities.
Activities are important to help gain some control over the situation. For example, encourage students to straighten up the room, arrange tables, etc., for greater safety during aftershocks. Use classroom materials and recreational games to structure time.

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SECTION VIII: HANDOUTS FOR FAMILIES

Supporting Families in Times of Crisis

Families, like schools, often are unprepared to deal effectively with a crisis. Supportive informational exchanges between a school and its families can lessen the disruptive effect of a crisis on students. It is important to remember, too, that parents and other adults are not inured to the effects of a catastrophe. Schools can provide support to the parents in their own coping processes, and parents in turn can better support their children.

The following handouts will help adult family members respond more sensitively to children experiencing the emotional effects of a crisis and will provide some reminders on self-care for the adult recipients. Your local emergency response organizations will have additional handouts or brochures full of hints for coping with traumatic deaths and other disasters. The *References* also includes other resources you may wish to obtain.

As a step in your program development, your CRT members may want copies of materials available locally and develop additional handouts specifically designed for your community. If your school population includes limited English speaking families, seek district or community help to translate all handouts into appropriate languages.

Family Grief

Parents would like to protect their children from the hard facts of life, but they cannot. When a family death occurs, the children are affected and may react in different ways depending upon their age and experience. Adults should remember the following points:

- Children need to be allowed to respond to the death of a family member in their own way. Each family member's relationship with the deceased is unique, and their response to the loss may vary from one person to another. Children must be allowed to respond in a way that is right for them even if they act as though nothing is wrong following a death.

- It is important not to exclude the children when grieving. Parents need to talk about their sadness with their children. Often children will blame themselves for their parents' sadness if the subject is not discussed openly. Very young children <u>especially</u> will view adults' anger, frustration, or sadness as being something for which they are responsible.

- Young children do not perceive that death is permanent. Children may see death as a bogey-man or as an invader who is coming to get them. Children over age 12 can understand death as adults do. The issue of death may become religious or philosophical, and they may question the justice of God who allowed the death to happen. It is not uncommon for adolescents and teens to have difficulty expressing their emotions regarding death and loss.

- Grief can be a critical problem for children. If a parent sees major changes in a child—such as a change in sleeping and eating habits, a drop in grades, or talk of suicide—within 18 months after a significant death, the family should seek professional counseling.

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Helping Your Child After a Disaster

Children may be especially upset and express feelings about the disaster. These reactions are normal and usually will not last long. Listed below are some problems you may see in your children:

- Excessive fear of darkness, separation, or being alone;
- Clinging to parents, fear of strangers;
- Worry;
- Increase in immature behaviors;
- Not wanting to go to school;
- Changes in eating/sleeping behaviors;
- Increase in either aggressive behavior or shyness;
- Bedwetting or thumbsucking;
- Persistent nightmares; and/or
- Headaches or other physical complaints.

The following will help your child:

- Talk with your child about his/her feelings about the disaster. Share your feelings, too.
- Talk about what happened. Give your child information he/she can understand.
- Reassure your child that you are safe and together. You may need to repeat this reassurance often.
- Hold and touch your child often.
- Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- Allow your child to mourn or grieve over a lost toy, a lost blanket, a lost home.
- If you feel your child is having problems at school, talk to his/her teacher so you can work together to help your child.

Please reread this sheet from time to time in the coming months. Usually a child's emotional response to a disaster will not last long, but some problems may be present or recur for many months afterward. Your community mental health center is staffed by counselors skilled in talking with people experiencing disaster-related problems.

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How Parents Can Help

- Much of the recovery work involving a crisis can best be facilitated by parents.
- The school may meet with parents in small groups and provide information as to what to look for and how they can help their children.
- Some parents may need individual help before they are ready to help their children.
- The school may provide opportunities for parents to discuss, in groups, their own responses and worries.

Crisis and Children

When people experience a crisis, family routines often are disrupted, and parents often face additional tasks and demands on their time. A crisis can effect the members of a family or of an entire community. Often it is hard for young children to understand what has happened during times of crisis. Some children may have completely confused views of the situation and may need your continued guidance and understanding through the experience. How you help your own children work through their difficult times may have a lasting effect.

Children can experience the same intense feelings that adults feel about a crisis. This is a normal reaction. Some children may show their feelings in a direct and immediate fashion, while others will wait until a later time. Most children will be confused by any sudden interruptions to their routines. Crisis situations are difficult for both children and adults.

Each child in a family may react differently to crises. Following a crisis, some children may:

- Become more active and restless;
- Worry where they will live, and what will happen to them if homes have been damaged;
- Become upset easily—crying and whining;
- Become withdrawn or depressed; and/or
- Feel afraid at night or when alone.

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After the Disaster

Having just experienced the shock and pain of the disaster, you will be busy for the next few days or weeks. Caring for your immediate needs, perhaps finding a new place to stay, planning for cleanup and repairs, and filing claim forms may occupy the majority of your time. As the immediate shock wears off, you will start to rebuild and put your life back together. We may all experience some normal reactions as a result of the disaster. Generally, these feelings don't last long, but it is common to feel let down and resentful many months after the event. Some feelings or responses may not appear until weeks or months after the disaster. Common responses are:

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- Take time off from cares, worries, and home repairs. Take time for recreation, relaxation, or a favorite hobby. Getting away from home for a day or spending a few hours with close friends can help.

- Pay attention to your health, to a good diet, and adequate sleep. Relaxation exercises may help if you have difficulty sleeping.

- Prepare for possible emergencies to help lessen feelings of helplessness and bring peace of mind.

- Rebuild personal relationships in addition to repairing other aspects of your life. Couples should make time to be alone together, both to talk and to have fun.

If stress, anxiety, depression, or physical problems continue, you may wish to contact the postdisaster services provided by the local mental health center.

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SECTION IX: REFERENCES

The following is a partial list of readings that may be helpful to you. Your local library or school media center may have additional appropriate materials. We encourage you to preview materials before purchasing or using in the school.

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Grief and Loss

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